

RESPONSE

This paper is in response to the Official Action mailed November 6, 2003. A petition for a three-month extension of time, extending the time to respond from February 6, 2004 until May 6, 2004 is enclosed herewith and incorporated by reference.

As an initial matter, Applicant notes that claim 7 has been amended for purposes of clarification. The present amendment is not intended to narrow the scope of the claim. No new matter has been added by way of the amendment; thus, entry of the amendment is respectfully requested.

Claims 7, 10 and 12 stand rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 102(b) as being anticipated by *Fischer et al.* The Examiner alleges that *Fischer et al.* teaches a process of delivering a fibrous mat into a steam injection belt press, heating the mat by simultaneously injecting steam and hot air into the mat, applying suction pressure in the steam injection belt press to capture and move the injected steam and hot air along a conduit line, wherein the temperature of the injected steam and hot air is between 100-140° C. The Examiner admits that *Fischer et al.* does not expressly disclose that the mat in the belt press generates/emits VOC gases during a heat pressing operation, but nevertheless alleges that this is inherent because volatility of a resin binder increases as the binder is subjected to a heating operation, and that it directly follows that generated/emitted VOC gases are also inherently captured by the application of suction pressure. The Examiner also admits that *Fischer et al.* does not expressly disclose that a condensation of steam and generated/emitted VOC gases is substantially prevented from condensing, but inherently teaches this in view of the similarity of the production processes, and in view that the temperature of hot air could be as high as around 140° C, while the claimed hot air temperature is only around greater than

100° C. Applicant respectfully traverses this rejection in view of the above amendment and for the reasons set forth below.

Applicant respectfully submits that the process disclosed in *Fischer et al.* does not include adding hot air to the mat as a separate step so as to prevent condensation, as recited in independent claim 7 of the present invention. Additionally, *Fischer et al.* does not disclose that the hot air comes from a hot air unit, as distinguished from the steam injection press, as recited in independent claim 12 of the present invention. Indeed, *Fischer et al.* only discloses the injection of whatever air may be inherently included with the steam, i.e., the "steam/air mix." Moreover, *Fischer et al.* uses condensate to form "part of the mixture that forms the board." (See col. 2, lns. 17-20.) The present invention is distinguishable in that it substantially avoids condensate forming in the first place, by the discrete step of adding hot air. As stated above, Applicant has amended claim 7 to more accurately reflect same. Accordingly, Applicant respectfully requests reconsideration and withdrawal of this rejection.

Claims 7, 10 and 12 also stand rejected under 35 U.S.C. 103(a) as being unpatentable over *Tilby*, in view of *Tisch*, *Eriksson et al.*, *Fischer et al.* and *Walsh*. The Examiner alleges that *Tilby* discloses a process of making a lignocellulosic board, but is silent with regard to injecting a steam to preheat a mat in a belt press. The Examiner further alleges that it would have been obvious to inject a steam to pre-heat a mat in a belt press taught by *Tilby* because it is a common practice in the art of making fiber boards to steam pre-heat a mat in a belt press before the mat is press-cured as exemplified in the teachings of *Tisch* or *Eriksson et al.* The Examiner admits that a heat-pressed mat in a belt press generating/emitting gaseous material is not expressly disclosed, but appears to state that this is inherent in the references.

Significantly, none of these references, *Tilby*, *Tisch*, *Eriksson et al.*, *Fischer et al.* or *Walsh*, disclose the addition of hot air as a separate step. Nor do any of these references disclose a hot air unit for supplying the hot air to prevent condensation of steam and/or emissions, as recited by claims 7, 10 and 12. Therefore, there is no combination of the cited references that would render the present invention obvious. Accordingly, Applicant respectfully requests reconsideration and withdrawal of this rejection.

Claims 8, 9, 11, 13 and 14 stand rejected under 35 U.S.C. 103(a) as being unpatentable over various combinations of the patents already mentioned, and further in view of *Puumalainen*, *Holik*, *Lehtinen*, *Westelaken* and *Pozzo et al.* Applicant respectfully submits that the cited prior art would not have rendered the claimed invention obvious.

Even if a person skilled in the art had been motivated to combine the teachings of the numerous references cited, the claimed invention would not have been produced. None of the additional references cited teach or suggest the elements missing in the references discussed above. That is, neither *Puumalainen*, *Holik*, *Lehtinen*, *Westelaken* or *Pozzo et al.* provide for the addition of hot air to prevent condensation of steam and/or emissions, as in the independent claims of the present invention, from which claims 8, 9, 11, 13 and 14 depend. Therefore, again, no combination of the cited references would render the present invention obvious. Reconsideration and withdrawal of the rejection are respectfully requested.

In light of the amendment made herein and the foregoing arguments, it is respectfully submitted that all of the claims in this application now possess the requisite novelty, utility and unobviousness to warrant their immediate allowance, and such action is therefore respectfully solicited.

If, however, for any reason the Examiner does not believe that such action can be taken at this time, it is respectfully requested that he telephone applicants' attorney at (908) 654-5000 in order to overcome any additional objections which he might have.

If there are any additional charges in connection with this requested amendment, the Examiner is authorized to charge Deposit Account No. 12-1095 therefor.

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Respectfully submitted,

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